

VZCZCXRO8006
RR RUEHIK RUEHPW RUEHYG
DE RUEHBUL #0268 0331342
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 021342Z FEB 08
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2636
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC//JF/UNMA//
RHMFIUU/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

UNCLAS KABUL 000268

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/FO, SCA/A, S/CRS, EUR/RPM
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG
NSC FOR WOOD
OSD FOR SHIVERS
CENTCOM FOR CG CJTF-82, POLAD

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [EAID](#) [ECIN](#) [ELTN](#) [TI](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: Extreme Weather Affects Traffic on Afghan-Tajik Bridge

REF: 07 Kabul 4142

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Since December 18, 2007, the Afghan-Tajik Bridge has operated full-time according to the agreement reached at a December 17 meeting of Afghan and Tajik officials (reftel). Recent winter weather conditions have led to a decrease in commercial traffic and to the bridge's unexpected, but welcomed, use for passenger traffic. The provincial National Directorate of Security director is satisfied with bridge security. Afghan officials confirm that use of the bridge remains toll-free.

Winter Weather: Decreased Traffic, Taxi Transfers

¶2. (U) The Afghan-Tajik bridge is open eight hours a day, six days a week (closed on Sundays). This year's winter weather conditions, among the harshest in Afghanistan's recent history, have affected seasonal traffic across the bridge. Commercial traffic has temporarily decreased to approximately 20-25 trucks and four-five cars per day. Several days of heavy snowfall closed the Salang Pass connecting Northern Afghanistan to the rest of the country, noticeably affecting commercial traffic.

¶3. (U) The extreme weather conditions also resulted in the temporary cessation of the passenger ferry between Afghanistan and Tajikistan due to below-freezing fuel temperatures. While the Afghans and Tajiks have yet to agree to pedestrian traffic on the bridge (there is a sidewalk provided), they did agree to the emergency measure of taxis transporting passengers to the middle of the bridge for transfer and continuation of their journey.

No Drug Trafficking Across Bridge?

¶4. (SBU) The provincial NDS director told PRTOff that he was satisfied with bridge security and did not believe the bridge would be used for drug trafficking, noting that informal border-crossing points in neighboring districts were easier trafficking routes and less likely to be subject to interdiction. He said that Tajikistan had recently decided to ban imports of right-hand drive vehicles, which had halted a profitable re-export opportunity for Afghan traders.

Bridge Remains Toll-free

¶5. (U) Afghan provincial border and customs officials confirmed that use of the bridge remains toll-free. Customs officials currently collect the duty according to a tariff schedule as well as a truck

tax, ranging from USD 50-200 depending on the vehicle's size and number of axles. The Ministry of Commerce collects USD 4 per vehicle and a tonnage charge for loading and unloading vehicles for security inspection.

¶6. (U) Comment: While the extreme weather has had an impact on the number of commercial vehicles crossing the bridge, traffic continues to flow full-time. The temporary use of the bridge for passenger traffic, a concession by Tajik officials, demonstrated its feasibility. Afghan officials are pleased with the current bridge operations and continue to look for ways to increase its use and operational efficiency.

WOOD